

A

# REVIEW

OF THE

# STATE

OF THE

# BRITISH NATION.

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Thursday, June 8. 1710.

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**I**N searching some of the Perplexities of our Commerce, How naturally does a Body stumble upon the Ages Follies, and how thick do these publick Difficulties *lye in our way*? Bread, Coals, Lotteries, Navigation, Banks, Companies, publick Credit, Variety of all kinds of *Jobbers*; such as Stock-Jobbers, Coal-Jobbers, Cow-Jobbers, Wine-Jobbers, Law-Jobbers, and State-Jobbers——I can but touch them as I go——And yet I do not Love to speak Slightly to a Thing when I am about it——My Design is not so much to *Complain* of Errors, as to *Mend* them; not so much to *shew* you the Labyrinth you are run *into*, as the Way *out of it*.

There are two intricate tangled *Skels* in the Trade of this Town, that really want unravelling, and bringing to rights again: Whether I shall be able to do you any Service or no, in the Attempt, I know not——The One is the *Mine-Adventure*, the Other the *African-Company*——Both Great, Handsome, Useful, Undertakings, and capable of being farther Settled; but both Embarrass'd and Perplex'd——indeed, in such a manner, as that, If they are not some how or other Deliver'd from the Encumbrances they struggle with, they must Dissolve, be Extin&, and be Lost to the Nation.

I confess there is no Comparison between them; neither is my *joining them here*, any signi-

signification of the Kindred of their Circumstances——One is a meer Adventure, which in its self might have some Probability, but as it stood surrounded with Banks, Assurances, Credits, Loans, and Paper-Stocks, was a meer painted Idol, set up for *Fools* to Worship, and *Knaves* to Cheat their Neighbours by; and I doubt had too much of the Cheat in its Original: But the other is a Noble, Capital, and National Undertaking; able to Branch our Commerce into one of the greatest, and perhaps the richest Parts of the World. A Trade rich with Improvements, Fruitful of unforeseen Advantages, capable of being made perhaps, the Greatest and most Profitable this Nation is concern'd in; and a Trade, which without any Export but of *Trifles*, brings back the most solid, the richest, and the best Return in the World.

When I formerly enter'd upon the Consideration of this Trade, it was a time of War between the *present Company*, and the *separate Traders*; and I could not speak of it without Embarking on one side or other of their Quarrels, and Recriminations; it was impossible to speak, and not make use of some of the Arguments, or Clash with some of the Opinions, that on one side or another were made use of at the Bar of the House, to carry on their respective Parties——And no Endeavour to speak with the greatest Impartiality, could prevent it.

But now we are come to at least a Cessation of Arms, *if not a Peace*. Two vain, tho' obstinate Attacks have been made upon the Company, and both have been Repuls'd——Indeed, I cannot say the Vigour of the Company has gain'd the Victory; but the Difficulty, or rather Impossibility of the Chimerical Settlements some Men have propos'd, has given the dead Blow to all their Attempts, and will render all such like Proposals alike ineffectual; for the same Defect must produce the same Deficiency, at all times.

To Dissolve one Company before we resolve upon what shall succeed, is like a Man going up a Ladder, who lets go with

one Hand before he has got hold with another; and such a one is sure to fall down and break his Neck. I know some Gentlemen are apt to tell us, they did propose a Settlement instead of the Company: It might be sufficient to tell them, if they had propos'd a sufficient Settlement, they could not have fail'd of their Point; For without Reflections upon any Body, they never can expect to find a House better inclin'd to them than the last was——Nor shall I enquire whether Arguments were duly weigh'd, and sound speaking listen'd to in the Debates concerning the Trade; or whether Opinion govern'd some Gentlemen; Partiality others, or Interest any——These Enquiries, whether they look one way or other, seem to contribute nothing to the present purpose.

It is sufficient to tell those Gentlemen, the House did not seem to find their Proposals an Equivalent to the present Settlement, or a suited Security for the Preservation of the Trade; else it will be readily ask'd them, Why did not you gain your Point? Nor will reflecting on the Judgment, Unanimity or Dispatch of the House of Commons, be a Plea here; for a Man may with small Prophecy, tell the Gentlemen——That as it was not for want of good Will, to dissolve the present Company, which the Temper of the House evidently discover'd——Nor want of Forwardness in the House to Settle the Trade; but from the meer Impracticableness of the Thing——And the infinite insuperable Difficulties, which the Schemes propos'd to the House were Clogg'd with——So those Gentlemen may take these two hints from me if they please——or let them alone if they please.

1. Their Notions were Built upon such improbable Suppositions, and such impracticable Foundations, that every Scheme they can ever draw from them, will be Attended with the same insuperable Difficulties.
2. These Difficulties will for ever Cause their Attempts upon the Company by a Parliament to be Abortive; since they



they can never expect to find a Parliament that will Unsettle a Trade of that Consequence, and so well secur'd to the Kingdom, unless some Settlement, more Advantageous to Trade in general, and at least equally secure to the Nation, can be propos'd.

From hence I take the Freedom to say, *with those Gentlemen's Pardon*, That all their Attempts this way against the *African* Company will be, and indeed must be Abortive—Because they want that Essential Part, which can alone support a Cause of that Consequence, when it comes to be **NATIONALLY** consider'd.

This being the present state of the Case, it occur'd to my Thoughts, That perhaps

I might speak to this great *Affair* most profitably, now the Weapons are laid aside, than I could before; because a Man may Examine, if possible, what Mediums may now in this time of Truce be found out, to prevent, as far as I can, a new War; which I foresee may End in the Ruin of the Company, but cannot End in Establishing the Trade—And tho' I am none of those that are most Solicitous about pleasing Folks, yet as I take no Delight in Angring any Body, methinks this Point may be so Handled, and with that Equality and impartial Regard to Truth, that neither side need take offence at it—But if they will, be there Occasion or not, the Author declares against giving himself the least uneasiness about it.

## MISCELLANEA.

I Am upon a very unhappy Broil among us here, Occasion'd by Encroachments, Combinations, &c. in Trade; and lately fallen out among the Coal-Traders, Masters and Owners on one side, Crimps, Fitters and Lightermen on the other.

I stated the Case as calmly as I could in my last: Indeed I think all these Things may, be talk'd of Calmly; and he that would heal a Breach, must rather quench than kindle the Inflammations on either side. I have seen but one Paper on this Head, and it is on one side: It is full of Argument, but it is full of something else too, which I shall carefully avoid; for tho' the Gentlemen are pleas'd to fall out with one another, neither of them shall fall out with me, if I can help it—At least not for want of Manners—If either Party Quarrel me upon the Consequence of this Debate, I shall conclude they are the Aggressors in the Difference, and Guilty of the Grand Mischief, from whence all the rest Flow, because no Man will be concern'd in the Reproof, but he that has a share in the Fault. If it should be my Misfortune to Anger both sides, *as is often my Lot*, I

must conclude, that there are Faults on both sides, and still the more need to Enquire into them.

I begin with the *Affair*, call'd *Combination*: I readily own, that Combinations in general, whether Legally understood, *I mean in the Letter of the Law*, or whether Artificially, as they may be couch'd by crafty Men, to elude and evade the Force of an Act of Parliament; they are all *in their nature* injurious to Trade, oppressive to particular Men, and tending to Monopolies, as all *Clandestine* Trade is an Injury to the Fair Traders in the same Branch—This is the Reason why our Laws are so strict, and so many ways pointed against Monopolies, Engrossings, Foreclosing of Markets, and exclusive Privileges in Trade, which, generally speaking, are always attended with Oppressions of Trade in general, and of private Traders in particular, as it gives some unfair Preferences, and unequal Advantages to others.

Now it is not for me to determine Truth of Fact without Evidence; let either Party defend themselves as they can: Who ever of them have by undue Combinations

FIRST



FIRST INVADED their Neighbours, these are the Aggressors in this War; and indeed *the occasion of all the rest*—And tho' neither side can justify illegal or clandestine Contracts to destroy the Trade; yet there must be ever a distinction (and an Allowance made for it) between Confederating against the very Being and Prosperity of the Trade, and honest Men Combining together to prevent unjust Encroachments—There must always be a distinction between Combining against an illegal Combination, and Combining to reduce the unfair Trader to an Equality.

*This I say*, because it is alledg'd by some of the Masters, That there are Combinations among the Lightermen, Buyers and Managers of the Markets, which are *Destructive* to the Navigating part of the Trade; and that this New Combination among the Masters, is to prevent the ruinous Consequences of those former Combinations—How true this is, the other best know, and I shall be very ready to clear them of the Charge, if they please to put it in my Power.

But in the mean time, as the others are Complainers, it is necessary to examin the Complaint—The Fact is so generally in every Man's Mouth, and so little deny'd by any Body, that there seems very little occasion to prove it. The Confederacy it seems, is between the Fitters at *New castle*, as Tools to the Coal-owners, and the Lightermen at *London*. These

Coal-owners, *I mean such as are in the Contract, for some honest Men are still left out*, by engaging the Lightermen into a Contract, for which they allow to Ten particular Men 1500 l. per Annum, some say a great deal more; and by which their Coals shall both be Loaded at *New-castle*, and Deliver'd at *London*, when others shall lye on Hand, have brought the Trade into a perfect Management, and brought the Masters to be a meer Property to themselves.

The Grievances of the Masters are really intollerable on this Account; their Subjection to the Managers in both Places would hardly be Credited, if Related as I have met with it; and the Arts, Tricks, and corrupt Practices to reduce the Price, delay the Ships, and ruin the Voyages (of all that do not come into their Measures) are innumerable—These I shall have Occasion to be larger upon hereafter.

In the mean time I fear this will be found to be the Foundation of all the Mischief, the Original and *First-born Combination*; and if so, all the Consequences of subsequent Confederacies will lye at the Door of this grand Combination—It in making this Enquiry, some black Designs, which really aim at the Ruin of the Trade to Enrich a few Families, do appear, it cannot be my Fault. Truth must come to light, and let the Weight fall where it will, I purpose, God willing, to search it to the Bottom.

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